

In St. Matthew's gospel, Jesus says: "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (St. Matthew 12.49-50). True brothers and sisters and mothers of Jesus—true family members of our Lord and Savior—do the will of our heavenly Father. Those who are truly brothers and sisters and mothers of Jesus take the commandments of God seriously—and strive by God's grace to be obedient to them every day. Brothers and sisters and mothers of Jesus—subdue their own will in favor of God the Father's will—They pray Jesus' prayer of obedience along with him—Not my will, but Thine be done (St. Luke 22.42) and they do their best to be obedient to our God.

None of that is easy to do. Just run through the ten commandments and ask yourself—How obedient have I been? How well have I done God's will?

You shall have no other gods.

You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.

You shall sanctify the Holy Day.

Honor your father and mother.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

You shall not covet your neighbors, spouse, or manservant or maidservant, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to our neighbor. (Exodus 20/Deuteronomy 5)

So, how'd you do? How far down the list did you have to go to find something you haven't done? Something you don't do? Something you don't plan on doing? How long did it take to find a crack in the wall of your faithful obedience to God? My guess—if you're at all like me— is that you didn't get past the first commandment before you realized that you're not always obedient to God—and the farther down the list you go—the worse your obedience looked.

So if true/faithful obedience to God's will is so difficult—who are these brothers and sisters and mothers Jesus is talking about in the Gospel? Who are these people who do the will of our Father in heaven? Well, look what Jesus does in the gospel. When his mother and his brothers come to talk to him—Jesus stretches out his hand toward his disciples—and then he says—Here are my mother and my brothers. (St. Matthew 12. 49)

Those disciples of Jesus were no different from you. Just like you they struggled to keep the commandments of God. They struggled to do God's will. They fought tooth and nail with the devil/the world/their sinful flesh— trying to be obedient to God. And very often—just like you and just like me—they failed. They sinned. They fell short of the glory of God because they fell short in being obedient to God.

And still—Jesus calls each and every one of them his mother and his brothers and his sisters. Before anything else—before keeping any commandments before doing any good works. Before doing anything at all—doing the will of God means doing what the disciples did—It means listening to Jesus.

That's what Jesus' disciples were doing when Jesus' mother and brothers showed up. They were listening to Jesus. When Jesus is transfigured on the mountain— God the Father

tells Peter/James/John— This is my beloved son. Listen to Him. (St. Matthew 17.5) Listen to Jesus. St. Paul says in Romans, chapter 10—So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10.17) Faith that does the will of the Father—faith that is obedient to God listens to Jesus.

When you listen to Jesus This is what you hear him say—
... I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.
(St. John 6.38-40)

Faithful obedience to God—Christian obedience that strives to do God the Father's will—listens to Jesus. When you listen to Jesus, you hear that Christ has forgiven all your disobedience. You hear that Christ has given you a new heart that will strive day by day to be obedient to God. When you listen to Jesus, you hear that he will never lose you. You hear that he will raise you up on the last day. You hear that when you look to him/believe in him/listen to him Jesus will give you a share in his resurrection glory. When you LISTEN to Jesus you are obedient to God our Father, and you do the will of our Father who is in heaven.

So take this opportunity during these holy days of Lent to do two things. First—Repent. Repent of your sinful failure to listen to Jesus as often and as well you should. Repent of your disobedience to God. Confess that sin to God—and by his grace and his Holy Spirit—God will tune your heart to listen more and listen better.

And then—listen to Jesus. Listen to him as he speaks from the pages of the Bible. Listen to Jesus as his Word is read in worship. Listen to Jesus as you read the scriptures in your personal devotions—(and if you can't read or see or hold a Bible—we'll get someone who can read to you—so you can listen to Jesus.)

Listening to Jesus is the obedience God desires. When we do what the disciples did—when we listen to Jesus—Jesus looks at us—stretches out his arms toward us—and says—

Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.
(St. Matthew 12.49-50)

Amen.